DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 211 SP 017 615

AUTHOR Reed, Ronald F.
TITLE Some Presuppositions of 'Analytic Thinking'.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 14p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Detroit, MI, February 17-20, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Style; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Inservice Teacher Education; *Intellectual Development; *Logical Thinking; *Moral Development; *Power Structure; Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

A year-long seminar for elementary teachers in analytic thinking for children (ATC) is offered at the School of Education at Texas Wesleyan College. ATC uses philosophy and logic to help children understand how they think and to improve their reasoning. Four guidelines are given: (1) Discuss the nature and function of authorities and arguments from authorities; (2) Avoid ethical pronouncements; (3) Elicit the support of authorities such as parents, church, and school; and (4) Model intellectual activity on a cooperative rather than a competitive base. In the main text used in the ATC seminar, "Harry Stottlemeyer's Discovery," a novel by Matthew Lipman, children are placed in an environment in which there appears to be no authorities at all or unknown authorities. This becomes a logical exercise, in which the child is free to learn rules without worrying whether the rules have any connection with the real world. The only pressure put on the child is to discover the rules of the exercise. It is noted, however, that shaking a child's beliefs in real world authorities is morally and intellectually reprehensible. The ATC program maintains that the proper person to enhance a child's analytic development is the suitably trained elementary school teacher. (FG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED199211

"Some Presuppositions of 'Analytic Thinking'"

by Dr. Ronald F. Reed

February 1981

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (Detroit, Michigan, February 17-20, 1981)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald F. Reed

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP 017 615

In this paper, I will assume the effectiveness of programs like the ones described below and will concentrate on dealing with some of the ethical presuppositions and ramifications of one of the programs.*

The following is a brochure description of the Texas Wesleyan program:

"The School of Education of Texas Wesleyan College announces the establishment of a Program for the Advancement of Analytic Thinking for Children.

We at Wesleyan believe that the elementary school should spend significantly more time than it does now on helping children to understand how they think. Awareness of the different kinds of thinking (scientific, poetic, intuitive, etc.) and the ability to distinguish among the various kinds of thinking have been shown to be important skills in the development of intellectual and academic ability in children.

The Program maintains that the proper person to implement Analytic Thinking for Children (A.T.C.) is the suitably trained elementary school teacher. As part of that training,

---

*Dr. Matthew Lipman has already said and written a great deal on this subject, and, I understand, is preparing more.

the Program offers a year-long seminar in A.T.C. The seminar, which meets for two and one-half hours each week, is open to current elementary school teachers in the local school districts. In addition to the seminar, a teacher being trained in A.T.C. will, with the help of an instructor, conduct classes in A.T.C. for elementary school students.

The main text used in the seminar and in the elementary classes will be Matthew Lipman's Harry Stottlemeyer's Discovery. This novel was written for the express purpose of helping children increase their analytic power.

Through the use of A.T.C., one should expect the following:

(1) A general increase in analytic ability. The student will be able to distinguish good reasoning from bad reasoning and will also be able, for instance, to distinguish good or bad scientific thinking from good or bad poetic thinking.

(2) A "carry-over" from A.T.C. to other areas, particularly, mathematics and reading . . .."

Simply, the above describes a program which uses philosophy and logic to help children improve their reasoning.

Let us say that philosophy is an activity which can more or less be described as critical thinking about basic beliefs. In philosophy, one attempts to analyze various concepts, trace connections among ideas, explain and justify, draw conclusions, etc.

As anyone who has been seriously involved with philosophy can attest, it (philosophy) can be a very unsettling experience. To the initiate or to the person about to be initiated, philosophy can appear to be attacking everything. Indeed, many professors of philosophy in the graduate and undergraduate level maintain that philosophy should be destructive, i.e., it should shake the grounds of one's beliefs before it can be constructive.

While we might agree that philosophy should have a destructive function at the graduate or undergraduate level, we are not forced to maintain that philosophy for children must be destructive. One works with fourth- and fifth-graders and one notes the obvious. These people, with whom one is working, are children. They are not mature. They do not yet act according to their own reasons. They are in a highly dependent position.

For the child*, virtually everyone bigger than he or she is an authority. All of those "bigger" people know or seem to know more than the child. Consequently, for the child, virtually every "x is good" unpacks to "s (parents, church, school)

---

*Here, and in the preceding, I am speaking in general terms. I realize that many children are quite mature and many adults are immature. I am simply trying to make some general statements about philosophy and philosophy for children.

say that "x is good." The child has not yet formed his own beliefs. Rather, he has simply internalized the beliefs of a whole (random) set of authorities. Intellectual maturing, then, can be viewed as a process of examining the set of beliefs one has and deciding (A) which authorities to accept and which authorities to reject, and (B) which beliefs to maintain and which to discard.

The crucial point to remember is that most children are not at the point where they can <u>decide</u>. They certainly are able to examine with profit but they don't have enough information, experience, or power to decide or to act on the basis of their own decisions. To shake the grounds of, say, a fourth-grade student's beliefs so that he would be in conflict with his parents, school, or church would be intellectually and ethically reprehensible. On the other hand, to assume that intellectual maturing is not going on, <u>i.e.</u>, to assume that the child is not, on his own, beginning to examine and question various authorities and beliefs is both mistaken and foolhardy.

Philosophy for Children

"How does one get children to think critically while respecting the integrity of their religious and ethical beliefs and while avoiding the danger of putting them into conflict with their social environment (parents, church, and school)?" A prime way and one which Lipman uses in Harry Stottlemeyer's Discovery, is to place children in an environment in which there appear to be no authorities or the authorities are not known. (Given the "absence" of authorities, one eliminates the possibility of conflict.)

The environment is a "logical" one. One invites a child into a world in which there is no direct pressure to act. In this logical world, there is no demand placed on the child to come to a decision. The child has time to "play" with ideas and to test conclusions without worrying about responsibility and, most importantly, without worrying about conflicting with the teachings of his parents, church, or school.

In a sense, the beauty and importance of the logical exercise, for the child, is that it can be divorced from "real-world" concerns. The child is free to learn deductive and inductive rules, conversion and substitution rules without worrying whether these rules have any connection with the real

world. The only pressure placed on the child is to discover the rules of the exercise.

It is precisely in this logical world that the child learns or can learn how to "gauge" reasons, how to say what counts as a good reason and what counts as a not-so-good reason. The child learns to think critically in a world which can be viewed as having no connection with the "real world" (the world where he must do X and avoid Y) and which, consequently, gives him the time to think and affords him the luxury of being able to make mistakes without being penalized for those mistakes.

Now, if what we say about logic is not a complete misrepresentation of the subject, i.e., if logic is a subject which can be isolated from real-world concerns, then one might ask why not use logic as the sole means of improving children's thinking abilities.

There are two answers to that question: (1) Although children do want a safe position, i.e., a position where it is safe to reason, to toy with ideas and methods of reasoning, to think without worrying about conflicting with what, say, Mom and Dad believe, they (children) do not just want a safe position. In our classes with fourth-graders, we see children demanding both time to think without fear and some sort of

connection between what they do in logic and real world problems. Children do not want to escape real-world talk. They simply want a break from it.* (2) Unless one is doing symbolic logic, one will, when dealing with children, eventually be drawn into some discussion of real-world concerns.

Avoiding Conflict; Respecting the Child's Integrity

We are maintaining that children will eventually move from questions in logic to real-world questions. Thus, we still must deal with the question we posed at the beginning of the previous chapter viz., "How does one get children to think critically while respecting the integrity of their religious and ethical beliefs and while avoiding the danger of putting them into conflicts with their social environment?" The following are some ways we have found effective:

(1) Deal directly with authority. Perhaps the ultimate goal of all intellectual activity is for each person to become an authority. The goal is an admirable one but given the

---

*For the reasons mentioned above.

nature of the world and given our limited capacities, this is a goal which, it is safe to say, we will not reach. Given the practical nature of our affairs and given the fact that we are sometimes forced to act with insufficient information, we must sometimes rely on authorities. In order to act intelligently, we must sometimes rely on authorities. A lesson to be learned (a lesson in humility) is that although one may be beginning to question or think about the pronouncements of various authorities, this need not force one to act against those pronouncements. Indeed, if intellectual humility is a virtue and if one wants to act intelligently, one can view intellectual activity or critical thinking as somehow complimentary to the authority of parent, church, and school.

(2) Avoid ethical pronouncements. There is a good deal of controversy raging around the question as to whether or how much a teacher should be a moral educator. The answer for A.T.C., at least, is fairly clear. One of the worst things that could happen to a student would be to be placed in a situation where the student is attempting to improve his reasoning skills and the person who is helping him, the teacher, is at the same time, making ethical pronouncements. The obvious danger, if the teacher in this course does make ethical pronouncements, is that the students will confuse the

pronouncements of the teacher with the pronouncements of right reason.*

(3) Get parents, church, and school involved in A.T.C. Stated negatively, if parents, church, and school are opposed to or view the activity of seeking good reasons, justifications, etc., as not worth while or as dangerous, then programs like the one we are describing are doomed to failure. Luckily, most parents, schools, and churches want their children to be able to tell good reasons from bad ones, to think for themselves, to not be swayed by current fashions or what the crowd thinks is right. Once parents are shown that A.T.C. has similar goals, they do become extremely supportive.**

(4) Use a cooperative model of intellectual activity. The model of intellectual activity that we use in A.T.C. is a cooperative one. In ordinary language, we attempt to get children to work together in solving problems. The following

---

*We are not maintaining that teachers cannot or should not make ethical pronouncements. We are maintaining, simply, that teachers in A.T.C. should not do so within the context of the course.

**At T.W.C., we have attended P.T.A. meetings where we have explained the program. We have also sent out explanatory letters to all parents. The most important and most effective way that we have found to get parents' support is to invite them into the classroom during a session and let the parents participate with the children in the reasoning process.

unedited excerpt from a conversation with a group of fifth-graders will illustrate this point.

Ron: We'll play the memory game, O.K.?

John: What is it?

Ron: I'm sorry. I thought we understood . . . thought I'd explained the rules.

Here are the rules. All . . . All fourteen of us, in this circle, have to say our first names and then describe our mental states, say something about our mental states.

So this is what happens. I say, "My name is Ron and I believe in green elephants with orange ears." Michael, who is sitting next to me, has to say "His name is Ron and he believes in green elephants with orange ears" and then Michael has to say his name and describe his mental state. Each person after that has to say everything that all the previous people said.

Louise: I'm glad I'm not last.

(Everyone looks at Karen. Karen is last.)

Charlene: Karen might get it. Might win. Dennis won't. Dennis is right in front of Karen and Dennis won't remember anything.

Donna: The game is not fair. It is not fair to the person who has to go last. I mean, it's not fair to the people at the end of the circle. The ones at the beginning. It's too easy for them. It's too hard for the ones at the end.

Gail: Why do we have to start with you and Michael? Why can't we start with somebody else.

Donna: You mean, start with you.

(Laughter)

Gail: No, I mean it would probably be fairer if we just flipped a coin or something to see who went first.

Ron: That's good. But I didn't finish describing the game. I didn't even say what the purpose of the game is. The purpose of the game is to get all the way around the circle without making a mistake.

A few years ago, the above description of the game would probably have caused a great deal of difficulty and have met with a great deal of resistance. Today with the rise of cooperative games, children in this class readily accepted the rules and purposes of this game.

What the game does is to provide a model of the kind of activity we are attempting to perform and convey values which will help keep children out of conflicts with authorities. Simply stated, the game places a high value on cooperation as a method for solving problems. The game and, in general, the method we use place a high value on cooperation. Cooperation with authorities is one way of solving problems, etc.

We realize, of course, that there may be good reasons for eventually dispensing with various authorities but, at this stage in a child's life, given his dependence on authorities, he must learn to live with those authorities. A program that put a child into conflict with his social environment, would, as stated previously, be both morally reprehensible (it would put a child in a no-win situation) and would be doomed to

failure (if parents, educators, and churches do not actively support this kind of program it will not succeed).

Concluding Remarks

We want children to think effectively and we want to respect their religious and ethical beliefs and not put them in conflict with their social environment. In order to do this we (1) discuss the nature and function of authorities and arguments from authority,

(2) avoid ethical pronouncements,

(3) elicit the support of authorities (parents, church, and school),

(4) model intellectual activity on a cooperative rather than a competitive base.